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MORNING BRIEFING

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USSR-JAPAN: Soviet Reaction to Suzuki's Resignation

TASS has reported, but not commented on Prime Minister Suzuki's decision not to seek another term as head of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a position that carries with it the Prime Ministership. TASS said only that the decision was prompted by the serious financial difficulties which the Japanese Government has been unable to resolve, and which have thus caused strife within the ruling LDP. TASS also noted that Suzuki will continue to serve as Prime Minister until the election of a new LDP chairman in November. ☐

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Comment: TASS avoided commenting on the foreign policy implications of the move, but the Soviets will be assessing the prospects for improved relations with Tokyo very carefully during the next few weeks. They are well aware of how Suzuki has been personally involved in the Japanese campaign for the return of the Northern Territories. Although the Soviets probably have little hope that the crisis will result in the LDP's ouster from power, they may believe that another LDP leader might be more willing to set the Northern Territories issue aside for the moment and seek improved ties with Moscow. The Soviets might even attempt to influence the LDP elections to a certain extent--for example, by hinting that Moscow might, depending on the outlook of the new LDP chairman, reconsider the idea of a Gromyko visit to Tokyo in the not too distant future. ☐

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